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Specialist says you can't out-threaten terrorists

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The Christian Science Monitor

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A rigid hard line against political terrorists will not deter future incidents and could cause physical violence. This is the argument of Prof. Frederick Hacker, a psychiatrist from the University of Southern California, who specializes in the study of terrorism.

Professor Hacker advised the Austrian Government on the handling of the Arab terrorist kidnapping of Soviet Jewish immigrants in Austria in September.

In a talk at Harvard University, he also defended and explained the Austrian Government's decision to close the transit center for Soviet Jewish emigres at Schonau Castle in return for the release of the four hostages taken by the Arabs.

Book on Munich lessons

Professor Hacker, who trained at the Universities of Vienna and Basel, was in Vienna at the time of the terrorist incident in his capacity as president of the Sigmund Freud Society. He already had completed a book on terrorism (now being translated from German to English) in which he dwelt heavily on the lessons of the Arab terrorist incident at the Munich Olympic Games in which 17 persons were killed.

After the Arab gunmen arrived at Vienna airport with three Russian Jews seized from a refugee train as well as an Austrian customs guard, the Austrian Government decided to let Dr. Hacker and another psychiatrist talk to the Arabs at the airfield.

"I had two interviews with the two of them," said Dr. Hacker, "and they went surprisingly well, little different from those I have in my office in Beverly Hills."

Dedicated fanatics

From his talks, Professor Hacker concluded that the Arabs were dedicated and fanatical, well informed about previous terrorist incidents and tactics, and believable when they said they were willing to die.

"From our point of view there was no longer any reason to drag out the negotiations," said Professor Hacker.

Shortly after that, according to Dr. Hacker, the Austrian Government decided to reject the terrorists' demands that they be allowed to leave the country with the hostages and that

Austria's borders be closed to transit of Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union to Israel. However, the Austrians offered to close down the Jewish transit camp at Schonau, a compromise which the terrorists accepted.

Wave of protest

This decision caused an international wave of protest, although Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, himself a Jew, insisted that the Schonau center had become too great a security problem.

"The Austrian Government was not of the opinion that it had bowed to any force," explained Professor Hacker. They felt they had rejected all the demands of the terrorists, but on their own had advanced a suggestion which saved the lives of the hostages."

(Schonau, which had handled more than 72,000 Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union, continued to operate until Dec. 10. Henceforth, Soviet emigrants arriving in Vienna in good condition will proceed directly to Israel, and those needing to rest will go to a Red Cross center 25 miles south of Vienna.)

Saving lives primary

To Professor Hacker, saving lives should be the primary goal in dealing with political terrorists. And to him, "saving life" means "the nearest lives, the hostages." He adamantly insists that there is no evidence to show that taking a tough line with terrorists has discouraged further terrorist acts, or that compromise invites repetition.

"I believe a previously determined hard or soft line is equally bad," he says.

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